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9 January 1967

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DEPUTY DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Possible Congressional Questions

Outlined below are some questions you may be asked and the lines we think your answers should take:

Question: Isn't the struggle in Vietnam really a South Vietnamese civil war in which we should never have become involved, a war in which North Vietnam began helping one side (the National Liberation Front) only after we had contributed a great deal of assistance to the other?

Answer: No, this struggle is not rooted in a South Vietnamese civil war; it is rooted in the Vietnamese Communist Party's (i. e., the Lao Dong Party's) 30-year old effort to acquire political control over Vietnam. The struggle in the south was initiated as early as 1956 on Lao Dong Party instructions, has been encadred and controlled from its inception by Lao Dong Party officials and has always been directed by the Lao Dong Party Politburo in Hanoi. In building the southern insurgent movement, the Communist keyed much of their propaganda and appeals to local southern conditions and genuine local grievances. The movement, however, did not start spontaneously as a result of these grievances. In the early years virtually all of the southern movement leaders were ethnic South Vietnamese but they were acting as representatives of the Lao Dong Party. Most of the important local cadre in the early years of the insurgency were persons who had been taken to North Vietnam in 1954, intensively trained there and returned to the south (often to their own districts and villages) to build and run the insurgent movement. The fact that until as late as early 1964 virtually all the insurgents were ethnic southerners does not mean that the insurgency itself was a spontaneous,

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indigenous southern movement as is claimed by Communist propaganda. In this regard, do not forget that Le Duan, Secretary-General of the Lao Dong Party and Pham Van Dong, Premier of the DRV, are both ethnic southerners and that the Lao Dong Party has always claimed to be a national rather than a regional (i. e., northern) political organization.

Question:

What ratio of friendly to enemy forces do we regard as necessary to succeed militarily, that is, to reduce enemy action to an acceptable level and secure control over most vital areas of South Vietnam to GVN control? What is our estimate as to the present ratio? (If the ratio is below the minimum shown necessary in similar wars, when will we reach the minimum?)

(Such questions are inherently dangerous, and might more properly be directed to the Department of Defense since they deal with essentially military matters.)

Answer:

There is no fixed ratio of friendly to enemy forces necessary to succeed militarily in a counterinsurgency situation, and no U. S. agency has established any such ratio as essential to success in Vietnam. Numerous ratios have been cited by unofficial sources, ranging as high as ten-to-one, but neither this nor any other ratio has been demonstrated as an absolute necessity in any situation. No two insurgency situations are identical in terms of terrain, level of combat, relative firepower of the opposing forces, and the degree of popular support and participation in the struggle. Factors other than the ratio of military forces frequently have a decisive influence on the outcome of the conflict. Moreover, even within the context of military ratios, the decisive factor is the ability to achieve the requisite superiority on critical battlefields. This has often been achieved in history through superior mobility, strategy, tactics, or firepower even when the overall balance of forces is unfavorable to the ultimate victor.

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In Vietnam, friendly forces currently enjoy a margin of better than four-to-one (based on current estimates of enemy strength). This ratio is further enhanced in favor of the friendly forces because of their overwhelming superiority in terms of rapid mobility, firepower (including tactical air support), and improvements in friendly intelligence capabilities. These factors enable friendly forces to attain a substantially greater margin of effectiveness, unit for unit, against the Communist forces in conventional operations.

In purely military terms, the current ratio in Vietnam is sufficient to permit friendly forces to dominate the major battlefields, thus neutralizing the capabilities of the enemy's conventional forces, while simultaneously increasing the strength of friendly forces committed to direct support of the pacification effort against local guerrilla forces.

Question: Is the buildup of friendly forces going at a faster rate than the estimated buildup of enemy forces in South Vietnam?

Answer: Yes. The relative rate of buildup of the opposing forces during 1966 was favorable to the Free World. In terms of overall manpower, Communist forces increased by only about 25 percent last year, while friendly forces grew by over 50 percent. In terms of the overall strength ratio, the relative advantages of friendly forces increased from about three to one to about four to one, based on official estimates of enemy strength. In terms of combat potential, the rate of growth was even more favorable to friendly forces because of their inherent superiority in mobility and firepower.

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